

Coming Clean

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## Coming Clean

Coming Clean > <font> Disclaimer: Not my characters. That was easy. Ok, I was starting to feel a little predictable with the stuff I'd been doing lately, so when this one popped into my head, I figured it would be a nice switch in gears. <font>

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Coming Clean

> "You know, I used to think you were just an asshole, but now I agree with Liz. You're just controlling." The anger in Michael's voice didn't touch Max.<font>

"Why," Max demanded, "Because you know I'm right?"

Michael glared at his best friend. Finally he shook his head. "It's not the same," he insisted. "It's not like you and Liz."

Max sighed. Sometimes he wondered how Michael could be both so damn dense and so damn stubborn. "It's not Liz, no. And it's not exactly the same, no. But there are some elements that are the same." Max locked gazes with Michael. "You hurt her. And you can try to tell yourself that you did the right thing, but I want you to look her in the eye and explain that to her." Michael scoffed and Max finally shrugged. "I'm not asking you to marry her Michael. But if you're not honest with her, you're going to loose everything you have with her. Even her friendship. Can you really handle that?"

"I've got everything I need Maxwell," Michael replied coolly as he walked off. "Unlike some people, I don't need to have the world at my feet."

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"I'm supposed to be in class," she fumed, knocking his hand from her arm. "What do you want?"

"I want to talk," he told her evenly.

"Talk?" she echoed. The concept seemed foreign coming from his mouth. "Fine. Talk."

Michael ran a hand through his hair and sighed. Somehow he imagined this to be easier. Max never seemed to have trouble doing this, even when it was something Liz didn't want to hear. \_Was nothing ever easy in this place\_, he wondered? Finally he looked at her again.

"Max says I haven't been honest with you. I haven't come clean." He looked past her, unable to hold her gaze.

"Fine. Do your shower thing here. And make it snappy, cause I have places to be." Maria crossed her arms in front of her chest and glowered at him. She most certainly did not appreciate being drug into the eraser room simply so he could ease his own guilt.

\_She had to be the most difficult female on the planet\_, he thought. \_And of course I get stuck with her\_. "Never mind," he muttered. This had been a really bad idea. He should know better than to listen to Max.

"Oh no!" she exclaimed, "You wanted to talk, so start talking."

They exchanged glares, but the steely lock of her jaw told Michael he either had to talk or drop dead. Dropping dead would be preferable at this point, but he wasn't sure he could pull it off.

"I have to be a wall," he said harshly.

Maria snorted. This was what he wanted to say? He had a thing for walls. "Yeah, I seem to recall you mentioning that." She turned towards the door. There were better ways to waste her time. His hand on her arm prevented her from walking out.

"I -" Michael stopped himself and sighed, turning away from her. This was harder than actually showing up for class. Harder than admitting that Liz would protect their secret. That she could be trusted. "I didn't mean to hurt you. I never did."

"Great," Maria replied dryly. "What, you want me to feel bad that I got hurt? Cause that's not the way it works."

"No!" The exclamation came out in a rush. "You shouldn't feel bad because of me. That's what I mean." He turned to face her again. "I mean you deserve something better than that."

Her expression told him he wasn't getting his point across. He tried again.

"Max and Liz it's different for them. Even if he had the chance, he wouldn't go home. Even if he knew he could, Max would just stay here. He's got family here. He's got Liz." Michael closed his eyes tightly. "I want to be able to go. I can't do that if I care about someone

here."

Maria shook her head. "You're not making any sense Michael. Do you have a point here, or are you just rambling?"

Her words cut him deeply, and he didn't want her to see that, but thought twice about it. Maybe she should see it. He reached for her hand and clasped it between his own.

"Maria," his tone caught her attention. "I try not to, but I always seem to end up hurting you. I don't want to. I don't want to be Max and fall in love, I can't deny that." She looked away, his words cutting at her. "But I don't want to think that I might lose you as a friend either." Maria looked at him, any harsh words she had been ready to say died on her lips. "Because I think that's more important. More important to have friends like you, and Liz, and Alex. Friends that care about you." He shrugged a shoulder. "I guess I'm kinda new to this caring thing. I never had to do it before, you know? I mean Max and Isabel, they don't count. I kinda have to care about them. They used to be all I had."

Michael pulled her close and wrapped his arms around her. "But now I have Liz and Alex. And I have you. And I don't think I could make it if I didn't have you guys. Not any more. I used to think I could. Used to think I'd be fine, even if Max and Isabel were gone. But I was wrong." Her arms slowly wound their way around his waist. "And maybe one of these days, friends won't be enough." He took a deep breath. "Will you be there if that time comes?"

She pulled away and looked up at him. "I can't answer that," she said slowly.

"Why not?" he cried. He hadn't expected that answer.

"I don't know what's going to happen Michael. Maybe I'll find someone tomorrow, maybe not for twenty years. I won't make a promise to you that I'll be there when you decide you want me. Especially when I don't know if I can actually keep it. It wouldn't be fair to either of us."

He turned away from her. Ok, yeah, that hurt.

"But what I can promise," she started as she moved to him and touched his back lightly, "Is that I'll always be here if you need me. For anything. I'll always be here. Always be a friend." Her voice lowered and she felt the sting of unshed tears. "I'm sorry if that's not enough for you."

Maria turned, wiping her eyes. She reached for the door once again, and again is stopped by his hand on her arm. Michael spun her to face him. His expression was unreadable, but it didn't matter when he pulled her close again and hugged her tightly.

"It's enough. More than I should be allowed to expect." He swallowed hard and let her go, taking a step back. A hesitant smile played at the corners of his mouth. "That's the hardest shower I've ever taken."

Maria laughed. "Next time I'll bring you a bar of soap."

He swatted at her, then reached for the door. "Thanks for being you Maria,"

"Would you open the door already?" she demanded. "I can't take much more of this. Next thing you know, you'll be professing your undying love for me or something." She smirked and elbowed him.

Michael laughed softly and swung the door open. "Shouldn't you be in class?" he asked innocently.

Her scowl only made him smile as he made his way down the hall, leaving her standing there.

End  
file.